

Building a Prophet
Perspectives on the Life of Joseph Smith

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Introduction

John Parry Jr., born in 1817 in North Wales, was not immediately impressed with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (more commonly known as Mormonism, even in its earliest days). In his autobiography, Parry described a prejudice he held toward the Mormon missionaries who had come to preach in his hometown of Flintshire—which he later blamed on the “false and lying reports circulated by hireling priests and religious people.” In 1844, however, Parry wrote of a Saturday evening when a friend visited and informed him of the death of “Jo Smith of America, the man who calls himself a prophet.” In the instance he was told of Joseph Smith’s death, Parry heard something whisper to him that “he is a servant of God.” From that moment on, he “never had a bitter feeling against the Saints.”¹

Two years later in the fall of 1846, Parry attended church with a Mormon missionary named Joseph Cain, who Perry recalled “testified with much power that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the most high God.”² In that moment, John Parry Jr. and his father, John Parry Sr. were moved to be baptized as full members of the Mormon church. By the next Spring, the younger Parry was already a branch president and a missionary. At night, he dreamed of the “Temple of the Lord of Zion,” which was just beginning to be built in the new Mormon settlement in what is now Salt Lake City, Utah.³ During the day, Parry and his family were “mobbed and stoned and slugged very often” because of their commitment to their new faith.⁴ Parry made plans for his family to travel to the peace and safety of the Mormon Zion, but he spent a few years working as a missionary in Wales before leaving himself. In the fall of 1849, a few months after the rest of the Parry family left for Salt Lake City, Parry received word that his mother and cousin both died in Council Bluffs, Iowa on their journey. John Parry Sr. continued without his wife, and despite the hardship of his journey, he wrote to his son when he arrived

saying that he should “sell [his] coat rather than stay in [Wales].”⁵ Parry Jr. journeyed to Salt Lake City in 1851. He remained a devout member of the Mormon church his entire life, and was placed in charge of building the second Mormon temple, in Logan, Utah.^{6,7}

One hundred and seventy-one years after John Parry, Jr. was converted to Mormonism based on his trust in Joseph Smith and his revelations, I am an eighteen-year-old passing by the Logan, Utah temple every day on my way to class. John Parry Jr. would be horrified at the joke his great-great-great-granddaughter has made of the religion he gave up everything to follow. “It’s a faith based on two principles,” I’d tell the few friends I had in the area who weren’t already familiar with Mormonism, “some hats are magic, and there was a brief window of time in 1830s and 1840s where God was cool with polygamy.”

This is not a good summary of Mormonism. As easy as it is to make fun of its eccentricities, Mormonism is a sincere and largely commonplace religion. As a result of its reputation for bizarre beliefs, the Church goes to great lengths to emphasize the traits it shares with Christianity. This occurred most notably in 2019, when Mormon leadership made the decision to rebrand the church as the full “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” because the nickname “Mormon” emphasizes the differences between Mormonism and other Christian faiths, rather than the belief in Christ that they have in common.⁸

Mormonism is not a belief *only* in Jesus Christ and God, however. It is also a belief that Jesus Christ and God provided revelation through Joseph Smith, a tangible historical figure who was alive less than 200 years ago. The name “Mormonism” comes from the belief in *The Book of Mormon*, which was received through Joseph Smith and is studied by Mormons alongside the Bible. Having faith that *The Book of Mormon* is scripture relies on personal trust in Joseph Smith’s account of translating the text from gold plate, and the divine guidance that allowed him

to do so. After the foundation of the Church, Joseph began to record revelations he received directly from God. These revelations established the structure of the early Church and were eventually published as scripture. Belief in the structure of Mormonism that comes from these revelations, therefore, relies on an ability to trust Joseph Smith as both a sincere individual and one that is worthy to speak for God.

Joseph Smith's religious significance makes his history especially complicated to communicate. There is no way to tell his story in a way that won't alienate one of the many groups of people for whom his story holds stakes. Mormon leadership depicts Joseph as an uneducated and shy boy, raised in a poor family, who sought truth, found it, and with the help of divine guidance, started a movement. There is a consistent assumption that Joseph is well-intentioned and guided by God, so every detail, decision, or mistake does not need to be elaborated. Over the course of the last century, however, more detailed accounts of Joseph's life were written by people who didn't attempt to venerate him. They tell the story of a charismatic, lazy, and deceitful child who was raised in a family that couldn't manage its finances and never repaid debts. This image of Joseph Smith carries over to detailed description of the mechanism of *The Book of Mormon's* translation (that Joseph dictated the scriptures while his face was in a hat, while the golden plates these scriptures were said to have been translated from were sitting on the other side of the room), and details that get glossed over in many Mormon accounts, like the failed illegal bank in Kirtland, Ohio, and the practice of polygamy.

For many Mormons, encountering histories that complicate Joseph Smith's story is traumatic and terrifying. However, I was introduced to Joseph Smith as a complex and ultimately fallible person before I was ever strongly attached to him as an idolized leader, which protected me from religious crisis. My parents were not devout believers, and they consistently included

me and my siblings in discussions of pieces of the historical record that wouldn't promote faith in Joseph Smith and the Mormon church. My malleable understanding of the first prophet expanded to include the moments of inconsistency and eccentricity that weren't emphasized on Sundays. By the time I was fourteen, I stopped attending church regularly. I didn't feel the need for moral guidance from church, and since, for me, the importance of the *Book of Mormon* and the Bible rested on a trust in Joseph Smith I never fully gained, I began to find religious texts allegorical and not especially relevant to my life. I didn't hear the whisper my great-great-great-grandfather did confirming Joseph Smith as a "servant of God," but I didn't expect to either. Even at fourteen, Joseph Smith didn't hold enough sway over my core values and beliefs for it to matter on a personal level whether he practiced polygamy or pressured his followers into a failed fraudulent banking scheme.

I've never met a Mormon outside my immediate family who had a passive transition out of serious religious practice the way I did. The church asks its members to make choices that are constant reminders of faith, and there isn't room for the traditional or cultural connections that those without a strong spiritual tie to the church might hold on to. When a Mormon attends church for three hours weekly, doesn't drink coffee or get a tattoo, wears temple undergarments, and gives ten percent of their income to the church each year as tithing, they are declaring active membership in the church and, by extension, trust in Joseph Smith. If a Mormon chose not to do these things, then they would not be able to pass the worthiness interview required to receive a temple recommend (that is, official approval to enter a Mormon temple), and therefore would not be able to participate in Mormon rituals, including weddings.⁹ Mormon temples represent a clear and public moment when members must decide whether they belong inside or outside of the

faith. “Mormons” become “Ex-Mormons” because Mormonism is a *faith*, not a culture or ethnicity.

My sisters and I don’t mind being on the outside together, and we get a kick out of calling each other heathens while we wait outside the temple during the weddings of cousins or friends. I imagine this experience was different for my grandfather, who waited outside during his daughter’s wedding. I never talked to my grandfather about his relationship to the church, but moments from his life and the lives of many of the people I grew up around remind me that the early history of Joseph Smith and the Mormon church holds grief and trauma. I am largely unscathed by this pain, which allows me to explore Joseph Smith’s story with unencumbered interest, and prevents me from fully understanding the burden of information that can crumble a worldview and separate a family.

A faith-driven understanding of Joseph Smith wasn’t always publicly challenged and criticized the way it is now, however. The veneration of Joseph Smith fit in with a broader US culture of historical celebration throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. Erika Doss labels the years from 1870 to 1920 a period of “Statue Mania” where, after the loss and divisiveness of the Civil War, American cities built statues of historical figures to inspire nationalism.¹⁰ The statues of Christopher Columbus and George Washington standing on pedestals or in contrapposto that appeared across the country depict an idealized and individualistic form of American history. In the history these statues present, our country appears by chance. If Christopher Columbus hadn’t been born to discover America or if George Washington hadn’t been a visionary general, there would be no United States. This is a lot of weight to place on a single person’s story, so it makes sense that American historians wouldn’t be interested in bringing up George Washington’s slave ownership or the idea of Christopher Columbus as an

invader rather than explorer. Historical figures like Columbus and Washington have come to represent America so much that a negative presentation of them is a negative presentation of America. This type of historical pursuit encouraged an understanding of Joseph Smith as a symbol of the Church's creation, identity, and accuracy.

The Mormon church financially invested in the preservation and celebration of its own history over the course of the 20th century, which helped promote a culture of veneration surrounding Joseph Smith. Celebration of Joseph Smith's history became part of everything from religious worship on Sundays to high school classrooms during the week. Monuments, historical reconstructions, visitor centers, and statues are maintained at the site of Smith's birth, the site of his first vision in Palmyra, two areas where he was imprisoned, and more than 15 other places that have significance in the timeline of Joseph's life.¹¹ By 1963, when the Mormon church reconstructed the entire Missouri jailhouse where Joseph Smith was imprisoned for four months, it would have been difficult to find any place related to Joseph Smith's life left unmarked. During the school week, most young Mormons gain further instruction in Seminary and Institute, which are classes for high school and college students that use academic church resources to teach Church history alongside secular coursework. Through these lessons, the Church promotes a positive and often romanticized version of Joseph Smith's story, and his veneration became central to Mormon identity.

The Mormon Church maintained a romanticized history of their first prophet throughout much of the 20th century. More detailed or even incendiary accounts of the life of Joseph Smith existed, but they didn't have an impact on the day to day understanding of most Church members. Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, published in 1945, was one of the first detailed accounts of the pieces of the Joseph Smith story that complicate his religious claims. It

brings up all the issues with Joseph Smith's history that former Mormons cite as reasons the church version of the Smith story isn't trustworthy. It was an easy source for a faithful Mormon to ignore, however. The synopsis on the back of *No Man Knows My History* asks whether Joseph Smith was "a genuine prophet or a gifted fabulist who became enthralled by the products of his imagination and ended up being martyred for them." A faithful Mormon already has the answer to this question, and has no reason to actively seek out perspectives that seem incendiary or resenting of a beloved leader. If a Mormon wanted more information on the life of Joseph Smith, they could find information using the sources they found in a Church library, and walk away with a satisfactory understanding of the origins of their faith.

The popularization of the internet, however, made broad perspectives available and largely unavoidable for anyone looking into Church history. Criticisms and negative portrayals of Joseph Smith's character shifted from a distant conversation among scholars (which was largely irrelevant to the day-to-day life of a believer) to an unavoidable and consistent tension. A teenager in seminary's access to historical texts suddenly represented an entire world of argument and complicating source material. The moments of deceit or injustice and cruelty in Joseph's life appear whether or not they are sought out: an innocent Google search for Joseph Smith is two clicks away from a list of his forty-nine likely wives next to their age at marriage, including girls as young as fourteen.¹² Members still sing the hymn "Praise to the Man," but it is easy to imagine many feeling uncomfortable singing lyrics like "faithful and true he will enter his kingdom / crowned in the midst of the prophets of old" or "blessed to open the last dispensation / kings shall extol him and nations revere" after discovering, after years of veneration, the times their prophet abused his power.

Church histories of Joseph Smith are still history. The fact that the church's narrative about Joseph Smith skips over or softens crucial aspects of his story doesn't remove credibility from the events in the Mormon narrative it emphasizes. A detailed description in one source of Joseph Smith's criminal trial for pretending to find lost treasure doesn't mean that a similarly detailed description of Joseph's survival of an intense case childhood typhus (which is featured prominently in many faith promoting accounts) can't also be true in another. The Mormon narrative argues that the latter story is more representative of Joseph Smith's character, and is therefore more deserving of focus in the study of Joseph's life. Mormons present a story of their prophet's accomplishments because of the fundamental belief that the result of these accomplishments is a church with incalculable positive significance. Mormon accounts of Joseph answer the question "How was the one true church restored?" not "Is Mormonism the one true church?" They find their answer in the pieces of Joseph Smith's life that inspire religious devotion, so his story becomes a compilation of faith promoting events.

The increased public discourse surrounding Church historical conflicts with devout Mormon belief, however, made it more difficult for the Church to present a historical narrative that is solely focused on a path to trust and religious devotion. Church leadership faced mounting pressure in the early 2000s to explain how things like polygamy could be reconciled with sincere belief. This led to the publication of a series of eleven essays that acknowledge and explain some of the widely discussed criticisms of the church in 2013, as well as a renovation of the Church History Museum in 2015, and, in 2018 publication of a history that includes many of the less faith-promoting events in Joseph Smith's life. Though some may have felt relief at the Church's acknowledgement of difficult topics, in many cases, these acknowledgements are unable to provide the airtight reconciliation between history and religion that a questioning member would

need to push away doubt. Instead, the acknowledgment ends up emphasizing the Church's inability to provide a satisfactory explanation for inconsistencies and wrongdoings, which strengthens the resolve of people who believe this history is incompatible with sincere faith.

The lack of a perfect explanation of Joseph Smith's complicated history is enough for many to leave Mormonism completely. The prominence of less romanticized understandings of the Church's founding prophet hasn't caused a collapse in membership, however. This is indicative of the fact that it is up to individuals rather than Church leadership to decide what types of historical sources are necessary to understand Joseph Smith, and which portions of his life take precedence when it comes to religious faith. Though familial ties and cultural upbringing have significant influence, the impact of a verse of scripture or a paragraph of historical argument cannot be determined for an individual by another person.

History is an argument for a particular connecting line between points in the vast and incomplete historical record. No explanation will untangle the knot of complex and contradictory depictions that can be pulled from Joseph Smith's historical record. My interest is in the way the individuals for whom this history holds the highest stakes compile their knowledge into a personal understanding of Joseph Smith's character, which they must use to decide whether that character is compatible with belief in the religion he founded. In the first chapter, public monuments and museums are analyzed as examples of trusted and accessible environments where Mormons learn about the history of Joseph Smith outside of a strictly religious or familial setting. They offer a window into the types of historical understanding the church provides about Joseph Smith. In the second chapter, biographies are analyzed to understand the larger categories of thought that most Mormons or former Mormons align with. When juxtaposed, these biographies depict the way choices in the description of seemingly straightforward events

(Joseph's birth, the family's move to Palmyra) add up to larger conclusions about Joseph Smith's religious sincerity. These sources inform the discussion in chapter three of a series of oral history interviews conducted with current and former Church members about their relationship with the history of Joseph Smith, and the extent to which this can be reconciled with belief in the Mormon church.

Joseph Smith's story matters. To the people who follow him, to the people who stopped following him, and to the greater American story of migration, expansion, and religious fervor. To me, because even though I don't follow Joseph Smith's religion, my great-great-great grandfather did, which is why I was raised in Utah. The competing interpretations of Joseph's story are a window into the impact histories with similar stakes are having across the world as we look closely at figures we've revered.

Chapter 1: Joseph Monumentalized

The story of Joseph Smith's first vision of Jesus Christ and God is canonized in the "Joseph Smith—History" section of the *Pearl of Great Price*, which is a Mormon scriptural text generally published alongside the *Book of Mormon*. In it, Joseph Smith writes about growing up feeling overwhelmed by the number of churches attempting to convert him and his family members until coming across James 1:5 in the New Testament at the age of fourteen. The verse reads "if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given." Joseph took the message to heart. On a spring day in 1820, he went out into the grove of trees behind his family home in Palmyra, New York, and prayed for knowledge about which church was true. As he prayed, he felt darkness and confusion descend upon him until he saw "a pillar of light exactly over [his] head above the brightness of the sun."¹³ Out of this pillar of light, Jesus Christ and God appeared before the young Joseph,

Notes

¹ John Parry, *John Parry: Pioneer, Missionary, Builder* (Self Published, 1997), 10-11.

² Ibid, 12.

³ Ibid, 26.

⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁵ Ibid, 37.

⁶ Ibid, 117.

⁷ “Chronological Temple List,” Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/temples/chronology/>.

⁸ “Mormonism” is used rather than “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” to keep this paper concise. Though the church welcomed the nickname in the past, church leadership moved away from this title as well as abbreviations like “LDS” because it distances the faith from a belief in Jesus Christ.

⁹ For a list of these questions, visit: “Church Updates Temple Recommend Interview Questions” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/01/aus-eng-local-pages/local-news-002?lang=eng>.

¹⁰ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 20.

¹¹ For a list of the main sites, which do not include monuments or statues not actively staffed by missionaries: “LDS Church Historical Sites: Historic Sites,” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/historic-sites?lang=eng>.

¹² On the main Wikipedia page for Joseph Smith, Emma Hale Smith is listed as Joseph’s first wife, with the hyperlinked phrase “and multiple others” next to it.

¹³ *The Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981. JS-H 1:16.

¹⁴ The use of seer stones was a common folk magic practice in Palmyra at the time. Joseph later used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon, so discussions of the fact that people, including Joseph and his father, used these for less sacred and strictly Christian endeavors complicates Mormon belief.

¹⁵ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Chichester, West Sussex, NY: Columbia University, 1998), Page 21.

¹⁶ Ibid, 91.

¹⁷ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Chichester, West Sussex, NY: Columbia University, 1998), Page 106.

¹⁸ Aleida Assman, “The Dynamics of Cultural Memory between Remembering and Forgetting,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 97-107.

¹⁹ Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 53.

²⁰ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Chichester, West Sussex, NY: Columbia University, 1998), Page 108.

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History,” in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. Reginald J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014).

²² No relation to Joseph Smith.

²³ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: *Proceedings at the Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument* (Salt Lake City: Desert News, 1905), Page 23.

²⁴ Gates, Susa Young. “Memorial Monument Dedication.” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 4, February 1906.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History” in *Untimely Meditations*, 21.

²⁷ *Proceedings*, 10.

²⁸ “Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial,” Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), accessed March 30, 2021, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/exhibit/historic-sites/vermont/joseph-smith-birthplace/birthplace?lang=eng>.

²⁹ *Proceedings*, 15.

³⁰ *Proceedings*, 19.

³¹ Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History” in *Untimely Meditations*, 23.

- ³² 1890 declaration: Wilford Woodruff, "Official Declaration 1," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/od/1?lang=eng>.
^{2nd} declaration: Joseph F Smith, "Official Statement by Joseph F. Smith," *Improvement Era*, May 1904, pp. 545-547.
- ³³ *Proceedings*, 30.
- ³⁴ *Proceedings*, 66.
- ³⁵ Shaun D. Stahle, "Smith Family Log Home Replica Built," Church News, January 24, 1998, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/1998-01-24/smith-family-log-home-replica-built-128487>.
- ³⁶ "LDS Church History Museum," HistoryView Virtual Tours, April 11, 2019, <https://historyview.org/library/church-history-museum/>.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Nietzsche, "The Use and Abuse of History" in *Untimely Meditations*, 28.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ "LDS Church History Museum," HistoryView Virtual Tours, April 11, 2019, <https://historyview.org/library/church-history-museum/>.
- ⁴² Harry M Beardsley, *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), ix.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.* 48.
- ⁴⁴ Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), back cover synopsis.
- ⁴⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Saints: The Standard of Truth* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2018), A Message from the First Presidency.
- ⁴⁶ Newell G Bringham, *Fawn McKay Brodie* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 52.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ⁵⁰ Orville Prescott, "Book of the Times," *The New York Times*, January 9, 1946, p. 21.
- ⁵¹ Bringham, *Fawn McKay Brodie*, 107.
- ⁵² The RLDS church, which split off from the rest of the church when Brigham Young took control after the death of Joseph Smith, threatened to sue Brodie and her publisher before the book was even published. They asserted that Joseph Smith never practiced polygamy himself, and that the RLDS church was therefore never involved in the practice.
- ⁵³ Hugh Nibley, *No Ma'am That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946).
- ⁵⁴ Bringham, *Fawn McKay Brodie*, 113.
- ⁵⁵ Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1974).
- ⁵⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Preface, xix.
- ⁵⁷ "Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling" (Deseret Book), accessed April 4, 2021, <https://deseretbook.com/p/joseph-smith-rough-stone-rolling-richard-l-bushman-5351>.
- ⁵⁸ Marvin Hill, "By Any Standard, a Remarkable Book," *Dialogue* 39 (2006): pp. 155-163.
- ⁵⁹ *Saints: The Standard of Truth, 1815-1846*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 2018), Preface, xviii.
- ⁶⁰ Peggy Fletcher Stack and Scott D. Pierce, "Mormon Church Publishes Its First Official History in Nearly a Century, and the Result Is an Easy-to-Read Volume That Tackles Some Hard Facts," *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2018/09/04/mormon-church-publishes/>.
- ⁶¹ Russell M. Nelson, "The Exodus Repeated," *Church Educational System Fireside Address* (September 7, 1997), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1999/07/the-exodus-repeated?lang=eng>.
- ⁶² Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 7.
- ⁶³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 19.
- ⁶⁴ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Saints*, 4.
- ⁶⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Saints*, 6-7.
- ⁶⁶ Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 28-29.

⁶⁷ Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 9.

⁶⁸ Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories 1832-1844*. vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 1-3.

⁶⁹ Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832-1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 23-24.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ One example, often used as a missionary educational material or in Mormon classrooms, featuring the first vision on its cover: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Our Heritage*, (Salt Lake City:1996).

⁷² Pew Research Center, "Mormons in America – Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society" (Pew Research Center, January 12, 2012), <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/01/Mormons-in-America1.pdf>, 13.

⁷³ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Saints*, 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 37.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 38.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ There is some difference in the way that *Saints* and *Rough Stone Rolling* separate these events too, as *Saints* places them in separate chapters, and Bushman allows the events to be more closely related by placing them in the same chapter under different headings.

⁸² The chapter titles in all three sources indicative of which event in Joseph Smith's life the biographies are presenting as the most meaningful during this time period. In *Saints*, the chapter is titled "Hear Him," in *Rough Stone Rolling*, the chapter is titled "The First Visions," and in *No Man Knows My History*, it's "Treasures of the Earth."

⁸³ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 19.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 21.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁸⁶ Tracy E. K'Meyer, "I Just Felt Called...": Oral History and the Meaning of Faith in American Religious History," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (September 1999): pp. 724-733.

⁸⁷ Sarah C Williams, "The Problem of Belief: The Place of Oral History in the Study of Popular Religion," *Religion & Belief* 24, no. 2 (1996): pp. 27-34, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40179419>, 29.

⁸⁸ Oral History interview with Ben by the author, January 27th, 2021.

⁸⁹ Oral history interview with Clarke by author, January 28th, 2021.

⁹⁰ Oral history interview with Karina by author, March 22nd, 2021.

⁹¹ Oral history interview with Julia by author, February 5th, 2021.

⁹² *The Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981. Moses 7:28-48.

⁹³ Interview with Julia by author.

⁹⁴ Oral history interview with David by author on January 15th, 2021.

⁹⁵ Notes from an oral history interview with Kevin by the author, January 24th, 2021.

⁹⁶ John, email message to author, January 19th, 2021.

⁹⁷ Oral history interview with Lael by the author, January 26th, 2021.

⁹⁸ Oral history interview with Mark K. by the author, April 11th, 2021

⁹⁹ Oral history interview with Drew by the author, March 29th, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mark K.

¹⁰¹ Interview with David.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *The Book of Mormon*: Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981. 2 Ne 28:30.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Julia.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Peggy Fletcher Stack, “We All Can Be More Civil on LGBT Issues, Mormon Leader Says” (The Salt Lake Tribune, January 30, 2015), <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=2108746&itype=CMSID>.

¹⁰⁷ Boyd K Packer (August 22, 1981), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teaching-seminary-preservice-readings-religion-370-471-and-475/the-mantle-is-far-far-greater-than-the-intellect?lang=eng>.

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Appendix

How connected to the past do you feel (1-10 scale)?			
	Mean	Percent choosing	
		8-10	1-3
Gathering with your family	7.9	67.7%	6.7%
Visiting a history museum or historic site	7.3	56.0	8.6
Celebrating a holiday	7.0	52.7	13.8
Reading a book about the past	6.5	39.5	12.0
Watching a movie or television program about the past	6.0	27.4	14.0
Studying history in school	5.7	27.8	20.8

Figure. Chart showing survey results about connection to the past from *The Presence of the Past* by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen.

Trustworthiness of Sources on 10-point scale:			
	Mean	Percent choosing	
		8-10	1-3
Museums	8.4	79.9%	1.3%
Personal accounts from grandparents or other relatives	8.0	68.9	2.4
Conversation with someone who was there (witness)	7.8	64.4	2.8
College history professors	7.3	54.3	5.2
High school teachers	6.6	35.5	8.8
Nonfiction books	6.4	32.1	9.1
Movies and television programs	5.0	11.0	22.3

Figure 1. Chart showing trustworthiness rating for various historical sources from *The Presence of the Past* by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen



Figure 2. The Joseph Smith Memorial Monument and visitors center in Sharon, Vermont.



Figure 3. Family photo taken by a missionary at the Smith log home in Palmyra, New York.

Being a Good Mormon?

How important is each of these for being a good Mormon?	Essential %	Important, but not essential %	Not too/ Not at all important %	DK/ REF %
Believing Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus Christ	80	13	6	2=100
Working to help the poor	73	24	3	*=100
Regular family home evenings	51	45	4	*=100
Not drinking coffee and tea	49	32	17	1=100
Not watching R-rated movies	32	47	19	2=100

2011 National Survey of Mormons, Oct. 25-Nov. 16, 2011 Q411. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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Figure 4. Results from a 2011 Pew Research Center survey of Mormons about being a good Mormon.

Interviewee	Date of Interview	Relationship with the church
David	January 15 th , 2021	Currently practicing.
John	[emails] January 16 th , and January 23 rd , 2021	Currently practicing.
Kevin H.	January 24 th , 2021 [recording failed, information based on notes]	Occasionally practicing with family, no longer believing.
Lael	January 26 th , 2021	Currently practicing, no longer believing.
Ben	January 27 th , 2021	Currently practicing.
Clarke	January 28 th , 2021	Occasionally practicing with family, no longer believing.
Julia	February 5 th , 2021	Currently practicing.
Hanna	March 21 st , 2021	Currently practicing. Convert.
Karina	March 22 nd 2021	Currently practicing.
Mark F.	March 24 th , 2021	Currently practicing.
Drew	March 29 th , 2021	No longer practicing.
Kevin S.	April 4 th , 2021	No longer practicing.
Mark K.	April 11 th , 2021	No longer practicing.
Dallin	April 13 th , 2021	Currently practicing.
Annie	April 13 th , 2021	Currently practicing.

Figure 6. Chart showing thesis interviewees and their current relationship to the Mormon church. All of these interviews informed the content of chapter 3, but not all of them are quoted.